

The Kohen who is exalted above his brethren... he shall not come near any dead person; he shall not contaminate himself to his father or his mother. (21:10,11)

The *Chassidic* Masters posit that the *Kohen Gadol* is prohibited from defiling himself ritually (*metamei*) to relatives – including even his parents, because, as the individual who stands at the spiritual helm of the nation, he should feel equally close to all Jews. The concept of “family” should not apply to him, since all of *Klal Yisrael* is his family. This is, of course, a very noble concept to which an individual who climbs the ladder of spiritual ascendancy should aspire. Veritably, feeling a stronger sense of closeness to one’s family is entirely normal. The *Ohaiv Yisrael*, *Horav David, zl, m’Lelov*, would bemoan, “How can people refer to me as a *tzaddik*, righteous person, if, in fact, I feel closer to my son and immediate family than I do to others?”

Once, *Rav David*’s son became gravely ill, causing his entire community of followers to pray fervently for his return to health. The *chassidim* loved *Rav David*; they knew that he acutely felt their pain. Thus, they reciprocated. They kept praying in prayer groups 24/7 until the doctor informed them that the danger had passed; he was on the road to recovery. The community’s representatives came to *Rav David*’s house to wish him a *Shehechianu* and found him immersed in sadness, crying profusely. They immediately asked what was wrong. Amid his tears he replied, “If anyone else would have taken ill, would you have gone to such extreme length to pray on his behalf? No! You did this only for my son. Should I not cry?”

The *Rebbe* was certainly appreciative of the efforts on behalf of his son. He was concerned, however, that other Jews could not hope to have a support system such as he had. I think it boils down to reciprocity. Students/*chassidim* feel close to their *Rebbe* because he feels close to them. The *Lelover* was an extremely warm and caring person whose students were his life. Thus, they reciprocated. Should it necessarily be this way, or should the students’ relationship be in return for the material, the Torah and ethics that the *Rebbe* is imparting to them? For that matter, should a child’s relationship with a parent depend on how “nice” the parent is to him/her, or should it be so because the parent partners with Hashem in the child’s creation? Undoubtedly, the Torah that we study should catalyze our love, but, due to the fact that we are human beings, subject to the whims of human nature, it would require very mature students and children to rise to such “spiritual appreciation.”

Love for a son or a student can, at times, overshadow all else. One becomes so obsessed with pride over his son’s/daughter’s success that he forgets that the fellow with whom he is speaking either has no children or has not been fortunate in raising them properly. Arrogating over others does not necessarily have to be about material blessing. One can be the recipient of incredible spiritual blessing and unknowingly, without thinking, rub someone’s face in the dirt with his comments.

The young (*Horav*) Zelig Reuven Bergis was an outstanding genius, whose *hasmadah*, diligence in Torah study, was legendary. As a young boy, he longed to go to *yeshivah gedolah* where there were Torah giants from whom he could expand his erudition in Torah. His parents wanted the best for their son, and they began contemplating the merits of each *yeshivah*. It came down to two *yeshivos*: Mir and Volozhin, both outstanding schools whose leadership was without peer. It was a personal proclivity which one would best serve the needs of their budding young scholar. Finally, *Rav* Tzvi Bergis turned to his son and said, "My child, the decision is yours. We will abide by it. I ask one favor: please do not inform me of your decision. Simply pick the *yeshivah* of your choice, travel there, settle yourself, and, in a few months, when all is well, you will drop us a line telling us where you are and how you are doing."

Rav Tzvi saw the look of incredulity in his son's eyes, so he explained the reason behind his strange request. "My son, your mother and I realize Hashem's blessing in granting us such a son as you. Your superior mind and outstanding desire for learning has enabled you to leave for *yeshivah* at an age at which other boys are still playing games. Most people are not so fortunate. Some have no children. Others have children that are not *yeshivah* material, and yet others, either do not have the wherewithal or the desire to spend what they should to provide for a *yeshivah* education. So, you see, we raise up our hands to Heaven with incredible *hakoras hatov*, gratitude.

On the *Shabbos* after you leave, I will go to *shul*, and people are going to ask, "Where is Reuven?" My friends have sons who are wonderful, lovely young men, who are working as an apprentice or simply are not *yeshivah* material. If I tell them that you went to Volozhin or Mir, which are today's preeminent *yeshivos*, they will feel a twinge of jealousy. Why would I want to cause another Jew pain? Now, however, when they ask me where you are, I will say I told you to look for a *yeshivah*. I honestly do not know where my son is presently. I will be telling the truth and not offending anyone. Later on, they will forget about it and you can write to me."

A father's love for his son was superseded by his sensitivity for other Jew's feelings.